

## The Poem

*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the piece of music these notes attend, is a translation of the extraordinary 14<sup>th</sup>-century poem of the same name. The poem was written late in the century (around the same time as Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*), probably in Northern England, by an unknown but masterful poet. It is in alliterative verse, which is eyebrow-raising, considering that alliterative poetry was at that time nearly archaic<sup>1</sup>. The poem follows "Sir" Gawain - henceforth just Gawain - as he embarks reluctantly on one of those quests so familiar in Arthurian literature: a doomed one.

Listeners familiar with my *Book I of Arthur* (Sunnyside 2017) may be wondering where in the overarching story *Sir Gawain* takes place: in another realm. *Book I* explored the pseudo-historical 5<sup>th</sup> century AD origin story of Arthur and how he came to be a king over a portion of Britain.<sup>2</sup> This work, *Book II of Arthur*, takes place in a fictional universe sprung ~six centuries (12<sup>th</sup> century AD) later from the ashes of the historical Arthur. The stories set in this universe portray various Knights of the Round Table on adventures only obliquely related to Arthur himself. Many familiar tropes come from this literature: Damsels<sup>3</sup>, sorcerers and giants, sun-dappled tents and jousts, mistaken identities, forbidden attractions, quests, steaming knights and magical doodads, self-destructive (and sometimes deliberately tongue-in-cheek) displays of delirious love. Yet some of these works<sup>4</sup> tell stories of warmth and humanity. They range widely in mood<sup>5</sup>. Most that I know involve moral tests and displays of code-following, and involve a conscious *setting out* on a quest (sometimes more than one).

What I find special about *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is the subtlety of its language - how it weaves symbolism into the symmetrical game-like organization of a work *about* someone being in a (kind of) game. How confident it is in its own ambiguity. The authors deft originality in synthesizing Christian, Arthurian, and mythological themes. How the plot is beautifully organized into cycles. How the "choices" it seems Gawain is making are illusory; in fact, he is passive and powerless.

The things that fascinate us as children leave marks imbued with a strange power. My father read me stories of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table when I was very young, with considerable verve. Jousts were nail-biting affairs, the knights enmeshed in a veritable soap-opera of plot-lines and personalities. The tapestry of characters and spiritual quests always felt achingly vivid. Intellectually, I appreciate Arthurian stories for different reasons now. They are historically interesting as a canon of stories drawn from ancient material and carried along the cultural current of time, picking up and synthesizing different aspects of the world in which they are re-told. The core message - that of an idealized democratic, moral society being undone by human nature - is certainly a rich enough theme. But that is not ultimately what inspires me to write this music. I do it because accessing that strange power sealed inside me when I was young allows me to speak in an artistic language that feels true.

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<sup>1</sup> Although there is evidence it had been experiencing a modest resurgence.

<sup>2</sup> There is little modern historians can qualify as "historical" in Arthur. Yet perhaps history itself, as we understand it, is much closer to fiction than it is to objectivity. Can anyone say definitively that Achilles did *not* exist? For what reason do we trust oral tradition and early history so little?

<sup>3</sup> In distress, yes, but also resolute, strategic, and influential to the story.

<sup>4</sup> such as those by Wolfram von Eschenbach, Chretien de Troyes, and Robert de Boron

<sup>5</sup> E.g. The quest for the grail; Tristan's tale of exile and forbidden love; Lancelot's guilt over his affair with Guinevere, and more.



## The Music

Rather than a character-and-event recounting of the story, in my music for *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* I mean to provide the experience of it happening in real time, in all its many different dimensions. Symbols, characters, mood, emotion, psychology, images, various time-scales - all shape-shift into one another. Think of Bach's (Johann Sebastian's) *Saint Matthew Passion* and how that work operates through just such continual shape-shifting.

In the notes to the score that follow, I talk about "motifs" and "themes". Richard Wagner's operatic music is woven from an ever-shifting web of so-called leitmotifs that turn the story itself into sheer audible counterpoint; listeners always hear the intangible presence of image and plot. Although my Gawain-music does not directly rely on anything more than the sound of a 16-piece chamber orchestra—I had no ballet or opera or movie in mind, nor does the listener need to have read the poem it is based on—still, it tells a complex story using the same kinds of devices.

All this said, my music would not exist without the text that inspired it, and a listener will only gain from reading that text in a modern-English version (of which there are many to choose from). I wish to express my deep gratitude to Michael Cohen-Weissert and the Charles Rosen Ensemble, who gave their all and more in working with me in Berlin (under the thumb of Covid no less) to bring the score to life. This music is a challenge to perform. Michael, a fine composer himself, was relentless in his pursuit of a more complete understanding of Sir Gawain; but for him, it would still be "that thing Logan is working on."

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## Act I

begins with the knights of the Round Table gathering for a Christmas meal, when an incendiary figure clad head-to-toe in green bursts in, goading the Knights to take an ax-stroke at his unarmored neck. His sole condition is that, in one year's time, he can return the stroke. The confused knights attempt to dissuade the uncouth visitor but are met with mockery. Gawain, nephew of Arthur, rashly agrees and lops off the Green Knight's head...looking on in stunned silence as the knight then collects his severed head, reminds Gawain of his oath, and walks back out the door. Amid a forced sense of merriment, the Knights contemplate Gawain's imminent departure and his potentially fatal meeting with the Green Knight in one year's time.

Within the first minute, you'll notice this theme in the high winds and glockenspiel:

*Round Table gathering*



This is the evolution of a theme (the “shape” reversed) that’s important to my *Book I of Arthur* - one that marks the story of Arthur’s conception and birth:

*Birth of Arthur theme from Book I*



...

The Green Knight <sup>6</sup>bursts in when the tambourine starts, with this theme:



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<sup>6</sup> The Green Knight himself embodies ambiguity in every aspect of his character. He has the trappings of a knight, yet there is very good evidence that he was inspired by non-Christian sources. He is menacing and comic at the same time. His theatrical outfit (he has ribbons in his green beard) is fanciful, his words mocking...yet his huge stature and gigantic ax suggest his grim task. What is the Green Knight's motivation? Is he acting of his own free will?

<sup>7</sup>Ornamenting the Green Knight's entrance, you'll hear - in the high strings and winds - a theme that is important conceptually to the story. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and arguably Arthurian literature in general, is often profoundly about failure. The greatest Arthurian stories portray individuals caught up in dilemmas from which they can neither disengage nor fully triumph over. This is the sound of that failure.

*Fate-Failure Theme*



The Green Knight scoffs at the group of knights, daring any one of them to take up his wager. The alto sax, entering over the *sul tasto* strings, represents the knights' (led by Gawain I.e yours truly) response. We find them only halfway jolted out of their reveries. If their order is not yet in peril, their confidence is only skin-deep.

These two realms of material - the responses of the knights and Gawain, followed by the Green Knight's insistent badgering - alternate again.

...

Finally Gawain, cutting off the Green Knight, steps up to the plate, so to speak. Here in full score is the Green knight's final mocking challenge, followed by Gawain's interruption and decapitating ax stroke:

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<sup>7</sup> I wanted my musical language for the Green Knight to be satirical. The Green Knight and the non-Christian, spectral world he comes from represent a destabilizing, chaotic (not "evil") threat to the Chivalric pretensions and Christian worldview of Arthur's court. Distorted by huge gestures and asymmetrical phrases and underpinned by a Courante rhythmic pattern, his musical language is intended to be both mockingly pompous and threateningly disorienting.

Green Knight's final "mocking":

**D**

The musical score consists of several systems of staves. The first system includes a treble clef staff with a 'D' in a box, and three staves below it labeled '3' and '2'. The second system has two staves. The third system has four staves. The fourth system has four staves, with the second and third staves marked 'arco' and 'Molto Sid Post'. The fifth system has two staves. The sixth system has one staff. Dynamic markings include *p*, *mp*, *f*, *mf*, *pp*, and *ff*. Performance instructions include *arco* and *Molto Sid Post*.

Gawain's interruption and ax stroke:

56 *тебя скор пиксуп, ага see you in a year---*

The musical score is arranged in 15 systems, each representing a different instrument or voice part. The instruments listed on the left are Flute 1 (Fl. 1), Flute 2 (Fl. 2), Oboe (Ob.), Clarinet in C (Cl.), Bassoon (Bsn.), Trumpet (Tpt.), Horn (Hn.), Saxophone (Sax.), Violin I (Vln. I), Violin II (Vln. II), Viola (Vla.), Violoncello (Vcl.), Double Bass (D.B.), Glockenspiel (Glk.), and Tambourine (Tamb.). The score begins at measure 56. The Flute 1 part has a melodic line with dynamics *f*, *mp*, and *ff*. The Oboe part has dynamics *f* and *ff*. The Clarinet part has dynamics *f* and *p*. The Bassoon part has dynamics *pp* and *mf*. The Trumpet part has dynamics *mf* and *ff*. The Horn part is mostly silent. The Saxophone part has dynamics *f* and *mf*. The Violin I and II parts have dynamics *f* and *mf*. The Viola part has dynamics *p* and *mf*. The Violoncello part has dynamics *p* and *ff*. The Double Bass part has dynamics *ff* and *mp*. The Glockenspiel part has dynamics *pp* and *ff*. The Tambourine part has dynamics *p* and *ff*. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings. The tempo and mood are indicated by the lyrics and the overall character of the music.

You'll hear the oboe and the alto trading big leaps after this. I imagined the moment just after the Green Knight's is severed from his body...the head leaving the body in a mist of blood, then slowly rolling down the floor. There is dreamlike silence; the head bounces.

...

Detached head in-hand, the Green Knight departs (on a *pianissimo* plagal cadence). Then follows a monumental tutti section:

**E**

The musical score is a complex orchestral arrangement. It begins with a boxed letter 'E' above the first staff. The score is divided into several systems. The first system includes woodwinds (flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon), strings, and percussion (timpani, snare, cymbal). The second system includes brass (trumpets, trombones, tuba) and woodwinds (oboe, clarinet, bassoon). The third system includes woodwinds (flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon) and strings. The fourth system includes woodwinds (flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon) and strings. The fifth system includes woodwinds (flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon) and strings. The sixth system includes woodwinds (flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon) and strings. The seventh system includes woodwinds (flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon) and strings. The eighth system includes woodwinds (flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon) and strings. The ninth system includes woodwinds (flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon) and strings. The tenth system includes woodwinds (flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon) and strings. The eleventh system includes woodwinds (flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon) and strings. The score features various dynamics including *mf*, *f*, *pp*, *sfz*, *sf*, and *f*. Performance instructions include "No vib.", "bounce low", and "bell". The music is in a key with one flat and a 3/4 time signature.

This material is a birds-eye “summary” of the wager itself and the Knights reaction to it - I could hear them heave a collective lament.

Embedded in this material is a foreshadowing of things to come, in the form of the Girdle motif, shown here in piano reduction:



The Girdle is the most important *object* in the poem, but equally important is the manner in which it is given to Gawain and the person who gives it. Somehow this material, which allows for many variations on its distinctive fauxbourdon sound, seemed to capture all these things and never wore out its welcome in my ear.

Gawain’s wager with his spectral opponent has taken an unexpected and unwelcome turn, but as a knight he *must* uphold his end of it. And so a little time passes, and he departs to seek out his foe.

## Act II

*begins with the description of the crest on Sir Gawain’s shield, “The Endless Knot”. The knot is a five-pointed star drawn with one continuous line, representing, we are told, the five points of perfection in Gawain’s character. After setting out to find the Green Knight, Gawain encounters a castle. “Pared from Paper” describes this castle, and those he meets there: Sir Bertilak, Lady Bertilak, and a mysterious older woman attending her. The lord and lady eagerly welcome Gawain.*

*At the castle, Gawain is invited to enter another wager: Sir Bertilak promises to trade the spoils of his hunt to Gawain for whatever the knight might gain during the day while the lord is hunting. While the lord is away, Lady Bertilak tries to seduce Gawain - who, torn between two tenets of the Chivalric code (never refuse a lady, never betray trust), accepts only a kiss, and that as a courtesy. In keeping with his agreement, he awards this kiss to the lord of the house on his return. In exchange, he receives the dressed carcass of the lord’s quarry. This cycle of events is repeated three times. On the third time, Lady Bertilak insists that Gawain take her girdle (belt), which she promises him will protect against any blow that might come his way. Stressed out about his upcoming neck-baring, Gawain accepts but does not give the Girdle to Sir Bertilak when he returns from his third hunt, and so breaks his promise. The movement ends with Gawain being led by the castle porter, up to a point, to meet the Green Knight at his “chapel”.*

After a figurative “curtain-raising” in 9/8 , I construct a fantasia that for me evokes the sharp angles and relentless energy of the English polyphonic fantasia. Entering in imitation, the motif - which, like the Girdle theme, allows for variation - is truly Gawain himself (I’ve had it in my head as a sound that represents Gawain for five years), and is used either as constructive material or right out in the open. I thought the patient and technical way the author develops the metaphor of a five-pointed star drawn with one line would be best expressed with polyphony.

Gawain's Journey

**B** ♩=115 Walking

The image shows a musical score for 'Gawain's Journey'. It consists of seven staves. The first two staves are empty. The third staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and a 4/4 time signature. It contains a melodic line starting with a forte (*f*) dynamic and a 'Non vib.' (non-vibrato) instruction. The fourth staff also begins with a treble clef, the same key signature, and a 4/4 time signature. It contains a melodic line starting with a forte (*f*) dynamic and a 'Non vib.' instruction. The fifth and sixth staves are empty. The seventh staff contains a melodic line starting with a forte (*f*) dynamic and a 'Non vib.' instruction. The score is written in a walking style with a tempo of 115 beats per minute.

At the same time, Gawain is journeying his way across windswept plains and towering forests, sun-dappled foliage and rainy marshes. Winding down out of the fantasia, the winds play the Fate-Failure theme we heard a glimmer of in Act I. This material does double-duty, expressing both Gawain's own inevitable failure in the story and, from a bird's eye view, the failure of the entire Round Table.

## A castle--"As if cut from paper"

The musical score is written for five staves. The first staff is a treble clef with a common time signature (C) and a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The music begins with a rest for two measures, followed by a melodic line with a slur and a *rit.* marking. The second staff is a treble clef with a common time signature, starting with a rest for two measures, then a melodic line with a slur and a *p* marking. The third staff is a treble clef with a common time signature, starting with a rest for two measures, then a melodic line with a slur and a *mf* marking. The fourth staff is a treble clef with a common time signature, starting with a rest for two measures, then a melodic line with a slur and a *mf* marking. The fifth staff is a bass clef with a common time signature, starting with a rest for two measures, then a melodic line with a slur and a *pp* marking, followed by a *mf* marking.

The strings eventually come in. A sudden flash of white looms above the treetops - a massive, ornate rampart. It is the rampart of a castle, so glittering white and exquisitely wrought it seems a mirage. This castle, described by the poet as if “pared from paper” (translations differ but the meaning is the same), presents a subtle reality check to the reader. Is it real?

It’s real enough that a saddle-sore Gawain is robustly welcomed by the lord and lady of the castle as he removes his helmet. Come in, come in...they’re honored to have him. Come show us how it’s done, they say, referring not to his martial prowess, no, but to his dazzling conversation.<sup>8</sup> Gawain gratefully enters the castle as his horse Gringolet is stabled. Then, a change of clothes...and only the finest for our guest. The interior walls of the castle are adorned with carpets and illuminated by countless torches. At dinner, not forgetting his charge, Gawain describes his quest to the curious couple. Ah yes, they say, we know that place...we can take you there. But since you have so much time to kill before the New Year, hang up your armor and hang out with us.

Sir Bertilak is warm and effusive - my music for him tends towards a kind of overheated Wagnerian rhetoric. His theme is something that to me evoked a hunting horn, seen here in the viola and cello:

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<sup>8</sup> The Chivalric code was as much or more about manners, intelligence, and virtue as it was about combat and honor. In literature, the code is as formalized as theater and indeed “presenting” was the point; a knight was supposed to conduct himself like a role-model in all respects. One might gape in admiration the delicate way he passed a bowl of mustard.



That night, as they drink and talk by the firelight, the second “wager” is agreed on by Sir Bertilak and Gawain. A stark contrast to her master’s luminous beauty, the old woman attends Lady Bertilak.

...

In the morning, we launch into the first “seduction” scene when Lady Bertilak walks into Gawain’s room, testing his willpower with her charming (and flattering) conversation and the concomitant Temptations of the Flesh. Gawain resists, with many a gentle deferral and witty retort, but, comically paralyzed by his own moral code, is eventually obliged to accept a single kiss.

Lady Bertilak’s material is derived from Gawain’s theme (she functions as a character only in relation to him), and is a two-part interval pattern I use as the basis of her addresses to Gawain:



Eventually, four fortissimo chords (derived from the harmonies in the first movement just before the entrance of the alto) propel us into the theater of the first hunt, with Sir Bertilak giving chase (actually concurrent with Lady Bertilak’s previously described approach to Gawain back at the castle). In come the drums.

The hunts are one of the brilliant devices of the poem. Each of the animals hunted - Deer, Boar, and Fox - have symbolic qualities, and to me all represent different sides of Gawain. Though he is physically lying in a comfortable bed back at the castle, fending off Lady Bertilak, we feel his essence, as it were, being hunted down and slain by the bloodthirsty Sir Bertilak. In each hunt, the soloist is playing an aspect of Gawain's character as symbolized by the animal being hunted. Beyond the symbolic transference, there is also a tonal one between the two scenes: into the lightly comedic flirtation of the bedchamber we transfer the feelings of tension and the images of gore from the hunt, indirectly imparting a sense of the danger our hero is in.

This first hunt features a symmetrical 5/4 groove, and a long flute solo over *pianissimo* string harmonics and then micro-tuned dyads. With the *col legno battuto* strings and the french horn completing their overlapping canons, and the little chorale concluding the hunt, we come back to the - now elongated - Fate-Failure theme.

...

The doors of the castle burst open and a smiling Sir Bertilak calls out for Gawain..in his wake is the panting hunting party, the carcass of the deer among them. Time to trade "boons". Sir Bertilak gestures toward the parcel of bones, flesh, and blood on the table...Gawain imparts to him a single kiss.

Tomorrow comes, and it's another spell of pillow-talk between Gawain and Lady Bertilak. I try to transfer some of the menace and blood-mist from the hunt into their repartee (as the author does by juxtaposing the two scenes). When you hear the *pizzicato* strings, this is the beginning of what is marked in the score "Formal and Earnest" I.e Gawain (the clarinet) gallantly refusing Lady Bertilak's sensuous entreaties. Once again he escapes with a mere kiss - accepted for manners' sake.

A gallant rebuttal:

FL 1  
FL 2  
Ob.  
B♭ Cl.  
Bsn.  
B♭ Tpt.  
Hn.  
Fl.  
Vln. I  
Vln. II  
Vla.  
Vc.  
D.B.  
Glk.  
D. S.

Rehearsal mark 183 is indicated at the beginning of each staff. The score includes dynamic markings such as *mf*, *pp*, *f*, *mp*, *p*, and *ff*. The Violin I and II parts are marked *pizz.* (pizzicato). The Double Bass part is marked *f*. The Glockenspiel part is marked *ff*. The score features various musical notations including slurs, accents, and articulation marks.

...

Simultaneously, the second hunt is happening. This time it's a fearsome Boar. After the unaccompanied alto solo<sup>9</sup> we go to the last seduction scene. This time, I've brought back one of the themes from Gawain's fantasia to interact with Lady Bertilak.

The image displays a musical score for a scene. It consists of several systems of staves. The first system includes a vocal line (top) and a piano accompaniment (middle). The second system features a string section with 'arco' and 'Flautando' markings. The third system includes a 'Cloth' part. Annotations include a pink oval around a first staff, a green oval around a second staff, and a brown oval around a third staff.

<sup>9</sup> Neither of my unaccompanied solos serve any structural function, but are instead me “playing” Gawain moment-to-moment at those particular points in the story.



The image shows a page of a musical score for a symphony. The score is arranged in a standard orchestral format with staves for various instruments. The instruments listed on the left are: Fl. 1, Fl. 2, Ob., B. Cl., Bsn., H. Tpt., Hn., B. Cl., Vln. I, Vln. II, Vla., Vc., D.B., and Glk. The score includes various musical notations such as dynamics (mf, f, ff, p, mp), articulation (accents, slurs), and performance instructions like "Sul Pont." and "(detache)". A large number "3" is written in the Oboe staff, and a large number "4" is written in the Bassoon staff. The score is written in a key signature of two sharps (D major or F# minor) and a 4/4 time signature.

We migrate over to the last hunt - the Fox. You'll hear that the first phrase of the Girdle chorale has become an ostinato in the viola and cello. Gawain's fantasia is briefly set against the Girdle theme, there is a brief interlude, and then we're off to another dual solo section with drummer and alto sax, this time over a Chacarera groove.

...

When Sir Bertilak comes back from this last hunt, Gawain withholds the girdle and instead gives him the usual kiss, receiving the carcass of the fox in return. At this omission, Gawain's failure is complete, though no judgement has as of yet been rendered. As the New Year draws near, Gawain must promptly depart to meet the Green Knight and fulfill his end of the wager.

Act II ends with a reprise of material from the first movement, bookended by a final variation of the Fate-Failure theme.

### **Act III**

*Having broken the Chivalric oath by lying, Gawain readies himself to meet the Green Knight once again and receive the blow he has had coming to him for a year. Once he has been left by the castle porter partway to the Green Knight's "chapel", Gawain comes upon a narrow valley - a fissure - surrounded by rugged cliffs. From the top of it, he hears a metallic howling; looking up, he sees the Green knight atop the cliff, sharpening his ax.*

*After an initial back-and-forth, Gawain presents his neck. The Green Knight brings his ax down, stopping a hair's breadth away from Gawain's neck. Gawain flinches, prompting mockery from his ebullient Green foe. Gawain steels himself for another, real blow. The Knight strikes again, swerving at the last second. A defiant Gawain tells the Green Knight better do what he needs to do or prepare for a fight.*

*So Gawain grimly readies himself for the blow, the final blow. The ax is drawn back, and released...nicking Gawain's neck only enough to draw blood. At this Gawain leaps back: his original oath has been fulfilled to the letter, and he will not suffer another blow.*

*The Green Knight delights in this spectacle, and commends Gawain for keeping his nerve. Now, finally, he reveals to him the machinery that has been at work around him all this time: he, the Green Knight, and Sir Bertilak are one and the same person/specter; furthermore, he has been acting in tandem with Lady Bertilak to poke a hole in Gawain's moral code. All this has been at the behest of none other than Morgan the sorceress—an important character in Arthurian lore and half-sister to Arthur himself. (She was in disguise back at the castle, as that old woman in attendance on Lady Bertilak.)*

*The Green Knight lets Gawain know that he handled himself well, except for two things. As a pious knight, he should have trusted in God to save him, and he shouldn't have lied to his host. Gawain is both furious and embarrassed, but parts with the Green Knight on the good terms. The Round Table is overjoyed at Gawain's return. Though Gawain rebukes himself for it, the other knights laugh at his lapse in rectitude with the girdle. Who wouldn't have done the same? In honor of his quest, the knights take to wearing green sashes around the court.*

Unlike the second Act, the plot is straightforward: it is mostly one long interaction between Gawain and the Green Knight. Instead of events, I zoom in on the psychology, emotion, and mood of the encounter. Most of this movement is structured around the harmony of a stretched-out blues form (in the key of D-major); the turnaround (the part just before the form repeats) is as follows. The blues has always been the "final form" of Gawain's material, and seemed to me necessary to express the subtly absurd<sup>11</sup> fatalism of the story and the forbearance of Gawain himself.

Listen for the highlighted "call-and-response" melody. Repeated twice, a whole step apart, this is the V, IV just before the I:

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<sup>11</sup> Why should Gawain be compelled to honor an oath made in bad faith? Why should Gawain be pressured by the Chivalric code to accept the -potentially lifesaving - girdle from Lady Bertilak (remember, never refuse a lady), then scolded for it? Why do the knights at Camelot trivialize the mistake Gawain agonizes over? What matters? The feints of the Green Knight are just one manifestation Gawain's powerlessness in the clockwork surrounding him.

This musical score is for a string quartet, consisting of four staves for the Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello/Double Bass. The score is written in a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a common time signature (C). The music is characterized by dynamic contrasts and specific performance techniques.

Key features of the score include:

- Violin I:** Features a melodic line with dynamics ranging from *pp* (pianissimo) to *ff* (fortissimo). It includes a *detache* marking and a triplet of eighth notes.
- Violin II:** Provides harmonic support with dynamics from *ff* to *p* (piano).
- Viola:** Plays a melodic line with dynamics from *ff* to *p*.
- Cello/Double Bass:** Features a rhythmic accompaniment with dynamics from *ff* to *f* (forte). It includes an *arco* marking and a triplet of eighth notes.

Two specific passages are highlighted with colored backgrounds:

- Orange Highlight:** A triplet of eighth notes in the Cello/Double Bass staff, marked with a forte (*f*) dynamic.
- Green Highlight:** A melodic phrase in the Viola staff, marked with a forte (*f*) dynamic.

The score concludes with a final measure in the Cello/Double Bass staff, marked with a forte (*f*) dynamic.

The orchestral music begins with each footstep Gawain is making on his doleful march to the Green Knight. After this ruminative journey, they meet at the fissure and the Green Knight greets Gawain. You'll hear the same theme that marked the Green Knight's entry in the first Act.

**♩=120 Festive, Mocking**

**B**

mp  
sol/notes ingale  
ff  
mp  
mf

31

mf  
mf  
f  
mf  
ff  
mf  
mp  
f  
mp  
ff

Glowering Gawain offers a response (marked “Brooding” in the score):

**♩ = 60 Brooding**

**C**

The musical score is written for a piano and consists of several staves. The tempo is marked as ♩ = 60 and the mood is "Brooding". The key signature is C major. The score includes various dynamic markings: *mf*, *ppp*, *f*, *ff*, and *pizz.*. It features complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and sixteenth-note runs. Performance instructions include *Sul Pont.* and *flectando*. The score is divided into three measures, with the first two measures containing dense rhythmic activity and the third measure featuring a more melodic line.

“Lets get this over with”, says Gawain. Eventually, the first ax stroke is heard - you’ll recognize this fanfare from Act I.

First stroke

**E** =120 Festive, Mocking

The musical score is for a piece titled "First stroke" with a tempo of 120. It is marked "Festive, Mocking". The score consists of five staves. The first staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The second staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp. The third staff has a bass clef and a key signature of one sharp. The fourth and fifth staves have bass clefs and a key signature of one sharp. The music is marked "ff" and "f". The score features complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and sixteenth notes, and is marked with a tempo of 120. A large "E" in a box is placed at the beginning of the first staff.

At this feint, a confused Gawain lifts up his bowed head, whereupon the Green Knight has this to say (as earlier, the oboe represents the Green Knight):

**F** =110 Little Slower

ff > mf

ff mf

f

pp mf

f mf

f mf

Halter-tongue

pp

detache

move toward sul tasto

p f mf

detache

f mf

f

move toward sul tasto

p

mf ff

mf ff

At which Gawain, barely listening, mournful, steels himself for the second stroke. His oath is not yet fulfilled.

...

It comes time for the second stroke:

**G**

The musical score for section G consists of several systems of staves. The first system includes a grand staff with two treble clefs and two bass clefs. The top two staves feature intricate rhythmic patterns with many sixteenth notes, often grouped in pairs and marked with a 's' (staccato) above them. The bottom two staves are mostly rests, with some notes appearing later in the system. Dynamics include *ff* (fortissimo) and *p* (piano). The second system continues the rhythmic complexity, with dynamics ranging from *pp* (pianissimo) to *mf* (mezzo-forte). The third system shows a change in dynamics to *f* (forte) and includes a *arco* marking. The fourth system features a mix of dynamics including *f*, *mp* (mezzo-piano), and *arco*. The score is characterized by its dense rhythmic texture and dynamic contrasts.

At the second feint, a dreamy cheer comes over the Green Knight, and Gawain, realizing he is being toyed with, stands up to tell the Green Knight to finish what he started or prepare for a fight.

90

Fl. 1

Fl. 2

Ob.

Bs. Cl. 1

Bsn.

B. Tpt.

Hn.

A. Sax.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

D.B.

Glk.

D.S.

hi-hat closed

crash

*mp* *mf* *ff* *mp*

The Green Knight takes his time, reprising part of his material from Act I - this time *pianissimo*. Gawain kneels for a last time. The final stroke:

The image shows a page of musical score for an orchestra. It consists of multiple staves, likely representing different instruments or sections. The notation is complex, featuring many beamed notes, slurs, and dynamic markings. Key dynamic markings include *mf*, *f*, *ff*, *p*, and *pp*. There are also markings for *Sul Tac* (Sul Tacito) and *Sul For* (Sul Fortissimo). The score is written in a key with one sharp (F#) and a time signature of 3/4. The music appears to be a dramatic or intense passage, given the variety of dynamics and the complexity of the rhythmic patterns.

After this final stroke, there is a moment of stillness in the orchestra. The Green Knight (alias Sir Bertilak) unveils the cast of characters who have been toying with Gawain<sup>12</sup>. A three-voice theme emerges and begins to move upward. The fate that seemed certain is being unwound, through a theme that shares a similar texture to the Fate-Failure theme heard in Act II.

<sup>12</sup> Is his spectral, green form a disguise for the human Sir Bertilak, or vice versa? In this in-between, I found inspiration for his character.

...

So, as you might expect, Gawain gets a little spring in his step to go with his new lease on life:

160

Fl. 1  
Fl. 2  
Ob.  
Fl. 1  
3sn.  
Ppt.  
Hn.  
Sx.  
In. I  
n. II  
Vla.  
Vc.  
2.B.  
3rk.  
2.S.

Flute hits

*f* *mf* *f* *p* *ff* *ff*

Detailed description: This is a page of a musical score for measures 160 to 165. The score is written for a large ensemble. The instruments listed on the left are Flute 1, Flute 2, Oboe, Flute 1 (second staff), Bassoon, Piccolo, Horn, Saxophone, Clarinet in B-flat (I), Clarinet in B-flat (II), Viola, Violoncello, Bassoon 2, Clarinet in B-flat (3rd), and Bass Drum. The music is in a key with two sharps (D major or F# minor) and a 3/4 time signature. The score shows various dynamics such as *f* (forte), *mf* (mezzo-forte), *p* (piano), and *ff* (fortissimo). There are also markings for accents and slurs. The bass drum part (2.S.) has a specific instruction 'Flute hits' with a dynamic marking of *f*. The woodwind parts (Flutes, Oboe, Bassoon) have complex rhythmic patterns with many slurs and accents. The string parts (Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello) provide a rhythmic accompaniment with various articulations. The saxophone part (Sx.) consists of a series of slanted lines, indicating a specific texture or effect. The overall mood is one of rhythmic energy and complexity.

Emerging from this is a final, tutti variation on the Girdle motif over a pedal G:

174

The musical score is arranged in a standard orchestral format with 14 staves. The key signature is two sharps (D major), and the time signature is 4/4. The score begins at measure 174. The Flute 1 and 2 parts are mostly silent, with a *rit.* marking in measure 176. The Oboe, Clarinet 1, Bassoon, Trumpet, Horn, Saxophone, Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Cello, Double Bass, and Glockenspiel parts all play a variation of the Girdle motif. The Cello part features a prominent pedal point on the G note in the bass register. The Saxophone part includes a *6<sup>tes</sup>* marking in measure 175. The Glockenspiel part plays a simple rhythmic pattern.

Fl. 1

Fl. 2

Ob.

Cl. 1

Bsn.

Trpt.

Hn.

A. Sax.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

D.B.

Glk.

*rit.*

*6<sup>tes</sup>*

It is followed by some recurring material, and played in its entirety here<sup>13</sup> - the “Camelot” theme, shown here in piano reduction:



And in the orchestra:

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Musical score for a piece, likely from a medieval manuscript. The score is written in 3/8 time with a tempo marking of quarter note = 60. It features a vocal line and a lute accompaniment. The lute part includes a 3/8 time signature and a '3' indicating a triplet. The score is divided into two systems, with the second system starting at measure 181. Dynamics include *f*, *mf*, *p*, and *rit.* The key signature has three sharps (F#, C#, G#).

This describes the reaction of the knights to Gawain's homecoming and the story of his quest. Another tale has been added to the annals of the Round Table and it won't be the last. The knights don't dwell on Gawain's perceived failure. As for our doughty hero, the memory of the Girdle lingers long after the celebration, and ends the piece.